

## **Human rights defenders must be able to freely interact with human rights mechanisms**

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(Geneva - 13 March 2013) Human rights defenders must be able to communicate their concerns to human rights mechanisms without fear for their safety, says the International Service for Human Rights.

'The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders is unequivocal on the point that everyone has the right to communicate with international human rights bodies', said Heather Collister of ISHR.

'Unfortunately human rights defenders who expose human rights abuses at regional or UN human rights bodies face retaliation from governments intolerant of criticism', said Ms Collister.

Ms Collister's comments come as ISHR launches a handbook on reprisals for human rights defenders. Drawing on ISHR's expertise at the forefront of this issue at both UN and regional levels, the handbook is a timely tool for human rights defenders who fear reprisals through their interaction with human rights mechanisms.

The handbook comes as a group of over 50 states from all regions of the world made a statement to the UN Human Rights Council condemning reprisals against human rights defenders as an attack on the UN itself.

Ms Collister added, 'It would be extremely detrimental to the effective functioning of both regional and UN human rights systems if, as a result of the risks faced, human rights defenders were to avoid interacting with them. There is a real need for facts about on-the-ground situations so that the human rights systems can act appropriately and effectively in response to developments.'

'Defenders need however to be aware of the risks they face through interacting with human rights mechanisms, and to be informed about the avenues available to them that could mitigate those risks.'

'ISHR's handbook will assist those defenders who fear reprisals as a result of their interaction with the UN or regional human rights mechanisms, and who want to learn how they could leverage those mechanisms to generate some degree of protection.'

ISHR's handbook on reprisals is available [here](#)

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